

# Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month

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## **BILL LANN LEE**

Bill Lann Lee is the Acting Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the United States Department of Justice. Mr. Lee was appointed to this position on December 15, 1997. The Civil Rights Division enforces laws that prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, and other factors.

Mr. Lee is one of the country's leading civil rights attorneys, with a long and distinguished history of defending the rights of all Americans. Mr. Lee has spent his 23 year legal career seeking equal opportunity for all people and working diligently against discrimination in all forms, including in employment, housing, voting and education. Mr. Lee has extensive experience in many areas of civil rights law, including employment discrimination, access to health care, prevention of lead poisoning in poor children, access to public transportation, and equal access to education.

Known as a skilled consensus builder, Mr. Lee is an excellent litigator who has always fought zealously for his clients and who has also known how and when to bring a case to close through effective, pragmatic settlements that serve the interests of all parties. His honest, reasoned approach has won the respect of opponents and colleagues alike.

Before his appointment at the Department of Justice, Mr. Lee lived in Los Angeles and served as Western Regional Counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), the civil rights law firm founded by the late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. Mr. Lee began his legal career at LDF in New York as associate counsel in 1974. In 1983 he joined the Center for Law in the Public Interest, a noted public interest law firm in California, and served for five years as supervising attorney for Civil Rights Litigation. In 1988 he rejoined LDF. Mr. Lee also served as an adjunct professor of Political Science at Fordham University, and as counsel to the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Mr. Lee was born and raised in New York City, where his parents owned a small laundry. He credits his late father, who experienced bigotry despite his proud military service to his country, with providing the inspiration for a career in civil rights law. After graduating from the Bronx High School of Science, Mr. Lee won a scholarship to Yale University, where he benefitted from an affirmative action program to include minority students. Through his hard work, Mr. Lee graduated Phi Beta Kappa, *magna cum laude* in 1971. Mr. Lee graduated from Columbia University Law School in 1974.

Mr. Lee is married to Carolyn M. Yee and has three children, ages 17, 9, and 7.